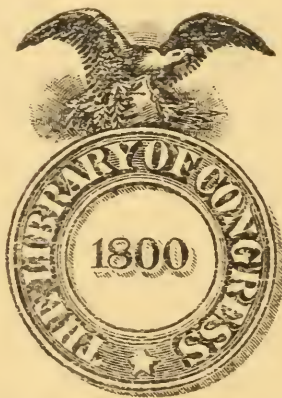


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Roberts' Series of Original Dramas.

HE

Couldn't Help It,

OR,

TRAPP'D AT LAST.

A FARCE IN ONE ACT.

SUITABLE FOR PRIVATE ENTERTAINMENTS.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY CHARLES C. ROBERTS
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Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1867, by CHARL
C. ROBERTS, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the
District of Massachusetts.

HE COULDN'T HELP IT;

OR

TRAPP'D AT LAST.

CHARACTERS.

- MR. OBLIVIOUS HOBBS. (A first-rate young man with a weakness.)
MR. FRANK FREEWELL. (Hobbs' college chum, and confidential friend.)
MRS. FANNY HARCOURT. (A bewitching young widow, fond of a little fun, but nevertheless a genuine woman.)
-

- SCENE I. Hobbs' Room.
" II. A Sitting Room.
" III. Same as Scene I.
" IV. Same as Scene II.

COSTUMES. Those of the present time.

TIME OF REPRESENTATION. About forty minutes.

SCENE I.

A Room. HOBBS seated near a table reading a newspaper.

HOBBS. (*Laying down paper.*) How stupid these papers are now-a-days!—no news,—editorials dry,—advertisements worse,—nothing exciting. Here I am, plump up to thirty two, and not married yet. Who would be a bachelor? Who *would*? Come, Hobbs I like *that* I

wouldn't, If I had pluck enough to propose, but I haven't, and so there is no use of talking. I've been trying to find out what a bachelor is good for. A man without a wife! he is like half a pair of scissors! can't cut; no use. A man without a wife is,—pshaw,—(*rises and walks nervously about*) a man without a wife is just fit to live in a lone room, like a rabbit in his burrow, as I do, without even a cat for a companion;—mend his own stockings,—sew on his own buttons, darn his own coat,—and in short,—

FRANK. (*Frank Frewill is heard speaking outside.*) Up stairs, is he? well don't trouble yourself, I'll go up.

HOBBS. Here's a blessed interruption to my melancholy soliloquy.

FRANK. (*Enters.*) Ah, Hobbs, my dear boy, how do you do? delighted to see you. (*They shake hands.*)

HOBBS. Frank, my old friend, I'm equally glad to see you. You seem in fine spirits this morning.

FRANK. How could I be otherwise, my dear fellow? splendid morning,—birds singing,—every body happy,—why shouldn't I be in fine spirits?

HOBBS (*Melancholy.*) Ah, true, true Frank; you are a happy fellow. Affianced to one of the loveliest of women, with the prospect of a happy marriage. Ah, Frank, you are a fortunate fellow;—thank heaven you are not such a miserable lonely fellow,—a bachelor like me.

FRANK. I do Hobbs, most sincerely, and at the same time permit me to remark. that you have no one but your stupid self to thank, that you *are* a bachelor.

HOBBS. True! true Frank! it's my fate, and I'm resigned.

FRANK. Fate, fiddlestick! it's your *fault*! now here you are, a well-educated young fellow,—good looking,—I may say prepossessing,—can carry on a successful courtship with almost any young lady, if it were not for that confounded bashfulness of yours, and still you don't try to overcome it, to master it.

HOBBS. (*Uneasily.*) Nay, nay, Frank! there you wrong me; never did a fellow try more intensely than I have to get the better of that weakness, as you call it, but I tell you my dear fellow, it is no use, I can't do it.

FRANK. Nonsense, man! nothing easier in life if you will only dash in, and set about it in the right way.

HOBBS. Ah, Frank, there's the pinch; if you will only tell me how to set about it, and help me to do it, I'll make one more desperate effort, and if I fail, I shall give up all for lost.

FRANK. Stuff and nonsense, Hobbs; where is your heart?

HOBBS. That's just what I want to know.

FRANK. Listen Hobbs, while I put to you a serious and straightforward question. Have you got any heart at all?

HOBBS. (*Seriously.*) Well, now, Frank, seriously, my private impression is that I have; but, to tell you the truth, it is of very little service to me, for I can find nothing to do with it. It is a blank.—a desert,—a blasted heath, without foliage or flowers. Yes, Frank, I am persuaded that I have a heart; but, as I said before, I have no use for it.

FRANK. You have, my boy; fill it up,—cultivate it,—let it expand.

HOBBS. Cultivate it? fill it up? what with?

FRANK. What with? why love, love, to be sure.

HOBBS. Love! come, I like that! I hav'n't even a cat to love, and I can't love myself; for, to tell the truth, I have a very mean opinion of myself.

FRANK. To tell you the truth, Hobbs, I am very much of that way of thinking too, and I sha'n't change my opinion till I see some prospect of a change for the better, in you.

HOBBS. (*Imploringly.*) Now, Frank, be easy with me;

you know I value your friendship more highly than that of any other person in the whole range of my acquaintance; you know that we were college chums; there our friendship began, and to this day it has continued unabated. I would undertake almost anything rather than sacrifice that friendship.

FRANK. Never fear that, Hobbs; you are too good a fellow to throw away for a single fault. You will be a man yet; but that will not be until you are in love. When you are in love, I shall have hope of you. (*Examines his watch and prepares to leave.*) Bless me, ten o'clock! excuse me, Hobbs while I step into the next street; I have a check I wish to get cashed at the bank. I'll be with you again in a very short time. (*Exit.*)

HOBBS. (*Retires up the stage, and sits.*) Ah, Frank, Frank,—happy fellow,—happy man; what would I give if I had such an easy, dashing way? he is polite, accomplished, and a favorite with the ladies; whilst I am awkward and bashful as a booby,—that is when there is any females present. When I stand before a beautiful and accomplished female, my tongue refuses utterance, I stammer if I attempt to speak, my legs get in each other's way, I don't know what to do with my hands, and my hat is a continual trouble. (*Resumes the paper and looks it over*) Well, so it is; and I can't help it; what is bred in the bone, they say, cannot be beat out of the flesh. Heigh ho! what's this? (*Reads aloud.*) "PERSONAL.—A young lady of prepossessing appearance, a widow, without encumbrances desires to form the acquaintance of some respectably connected gentleman, with a view to matrimony." Oh, what a terrible word. (*Reads.*) "She would require in a partner only that which she possesses, viz.: a kind heart, an affectionate disposition, and a sincere desire for mutual happiness. She is thirty years of age, and seeks an alliance based only upon pure love and affection, money no object." Beautiful, beautiful! who knows but this woman may be designed by Providence for me? But that is too blissful to be thought of seriously. (*Reads.*) "Address, through the Post Office, Fanny."

Fanny! what a dear, delightful name. Fanny! perhaps *my* Fanny; who knows? I'll consult Frank about this. This sort of thing will require no courtship, no cold formalities. Frank will,—(*listens*) that is his step. (*Goes to the wing and calls.*) Frank is that you?

FRANK. (*Without.*) Yes, coming; got delayed a little. (*Enters.*) Here I am, but not returned quite as soon as I expected.

HOBBS. Glad you've come at all events. (*Places chairs.*) Take a seat Frank, I've something to tell you. (*Both sit, Hobbs hands paper to Frank.*) Read that, Frank, and give me your opinion.

FRANK. (*Reads hurriedly.*) Personal,—prepossessing,—widow,—kind heart,—encumbrances,—desires to form acquaintance,—respectably connected,—amiable disposition,—et cetera, et cetera, and so forth, and so on. (*Returns paper.*) The same old style,—the old story repeated over again.

HOBBS. What do you think of that Frank? is not that description beautiful? so modest and unpretending.

FRANK. All gammon my dear fellow; I've something in reserve for you far better than that. I'll introduce you to a lady friend of mine who will captivate, nay, charm you.

HOBBS. (*Sinking back in his chair.*) Goodness me, there goes a fifty-six pounder plump down upon my heart, and scatters all my courage to the winds. It's no use, Frank, I'm past cure.

FRANK. Come, come man; courage! let the newspaper goddess slide, and I'll tell you about my lady friend.

HOBBS. Well Frank, let's hear, for I know I can bear the description.

FRANK. In the first place then, she is pretty.

HOBBS. Yes, pretty.

FRANK. Accomplished.

HOBBS. Yes, accomplished. That's good.

FRANK. Possesses an amiable disposition.

HOBBS. An amiable disposition. Better yet.

FRANK. And, in short, is in every particular a lady, and a true woman.

HOBBS. (*Getting a little excited.*) Glorious, glorious! how old is she Frank?

FRANK. She's old enough, and she's young enough; in short, she's just the right age for you.

HOBBS. I'll warrant me she is, if she is your choice.

FRANK. She is all that an honorable man could desire in a wife, and I propose this evening to call upon her.

HOBBS. You do?

FRANK. Yes, and to take you with me, and give you an introduction.

HOBBS. (*Sinking back in his chair*) Bless my soul, there goes a seventy six, to help the fifty-six to annihilate me! Now Frank, its no use! I can't pass such an ordeal! I can't. I sha'n't survive it. If you insist upon the thing, just do me the favor to call on the undertaker and secure his services, for I tell you I shall need them.

FRANK. All sheer nonsense, man! I have no doubt you will acquit yourself nobly, and what is better, make a decided conquest.

HOBBS. But, Frank, I can't go.

FRANK. I know you *can* go, and you will confess yourself forever my debtor for introducing you to such a lovely and loveable lady. (*Prepares to leave.*)

HOBBS. But Frank, consider,—

FRANK. Shame man; don't ask me to consider when there is a lady in the case. I shall call for you at seven

precisely, and you must not disappoint me. At seven, remember; so by-by, Hobbs. (*Exit.*)

HOBBS. *Following him to the exit and speaking.* But Frank, just listen a minute. Gone?—yes gone. Well, did you ever? that man has actually wheedled me into an engagement to go with him and make a call on a lady. I never did such a thing in my life; that is beyond my family relations. Me face a female? Preposterous! It can't be done, that is by me. Goodness gracious, into what a snare am I about to be led? I must retire and calm my perturbed feelings, and if possible devise some means to avoid this terrible interview. But I will answer the "Personal" and this may afford me a chance of escape. (*Exit.*)

SCENE II.

Apartment in the House of Mrs. Fanny Harcourt. Mrs. H. seated at a table engaged in sewing, crochet, or some similar employment.

MRS. H. Well, I declare, how very dull it has been to-day, to be sure. Not a single caller yet. That is rather strange, for scarcely a day passes that I do not receive at least a half dozen. I suppose I was wicked to put that "Personal" in the paper; but I do so like to have a bit of fun. It breaks up the dull monotony of every day life. I have received a dozen or more replies, containing the most nonsensical panegyrics;—"just the person for me, suited in every particular to please the most fastidious lady." Ah well, I fear that none of them will do for me; and I am sure I shall not break my heart for any of *them*. I wonder where my friend, Mr. Frank Freewell is? He never fails a daily call,—hark! who is that?

FRANK. (*Speaking without.*) I'll take the liberty to walk right up; I know the way.

MRS. H. There he is sure enough.

FRANK. (*Enter Frank.*) Ah, my dear Mrs. Harcourt, there you are, industriously at work as usual. How do you do ?

MRS. H. (*She rises to receive him.*) Quite well I thank you ; I hope Mr. Freewell is in good health.

FRANK. Never better in my life.

MRS. H. Pray be seated, Mr. Freewell. (*Both sit.*)

FRANK. Now, my dear widow, I protest against your Misting me so ; do please call me plain Frank.

MRS. H. Were I to call you *plain* Frank, you might be offended, especially as so many young ladies declare that you are *not* plain.

FRANK. Ah, widow, I perceive that you are disposed to be facetious as well as complimentary. But truly, call me Frank, and you will please me.

MRS. H. Shall I ? certainly then I cannot refuse to please you when you assure me that it can be done so easily. I will call you Frank, that is provided you will call me Fanny.

FRANK. I will ; and considering our long acquaintance, it will certainly be less stiff and formal.

MRS. H. Well, then, Frank, any news in town.

FRANK. Positively none ! news is scarce and business dull.

MRS. H. Have you been to the opera ?

FRANK. No ! to tell you the truth my dear Mrs. Harcourt,—I beg pardon, I mean Fanny,—I fear I lack that taste for music, which would enable me to appreciate opera.

MRS. H. Indeed ? may I ask what kind of amusement you *do* like, Mr. Freewell ?—I beg pardon—I mean Frank.

FRANK. None better than a chat with you.

MRS. H. A truce to compliment, Frank

FRANK. Nay, Fanny; compliments are usually falsehoods; I speak truth, hence I do not compliment.

MRS. H. Quite logical, truly, Frank; I admit the force of your reasoning; pray go on.

FRANK. Then let me tell you, Fanny, that I have an extraordinary reason for, and a special object to accomplish by, my present visit.

MRS. H. What is it Frank? an adventure?

FRANK. Indeed, Fanny, it may turn out to be one.

MRS. H. Delightful! let me hear it! can I in any way promote it?

FRANK. If you can not, be assured that no one else can.

MRS. H. (*Becoming greatly interested, lays aside her work.*) Do let me know how; I'm all impatience.

FRANK. Then listen, Fanny. I have a friend, a most excellent amiable man,—

MRS. H. Who wants to get married.

FRANK. You have hit exactly. He wants a wife; you have signified your willingness to marry again.

MRS. H. When the right man presents.

FRANK. Exactly; I remember your very words. Now my friend is one of the best of men,—

MRS. H. Of course he is; how could he be otherwise when he has a man to pronounce his eulogy? Frank, the ladies are better judges of the men than they are of themselves.

FRANK. You shall have an opportunity of exercising your judgment. I propose calling upon you this evening for the purpose of introducing my friend; that is, if you do not object.

MRS. H. With all my heart; any friend of yours is certainly welcome.

FRANK. But Fanny, let me prepare you. I am sorry to say that my friend has a failing.

MRS. II. Only *one*?

FRANK. Only one.

MRS. II. Does he drink?

FRANK. Not a drop.

MRS. II. Does he chew or smoke?

FRANK. Neither one.

MRS. II. Does he gamble?

FRANK. Never.

MRS. II. Bless me, what is it? does he squint?

FRANK. You have not hit it yet.

MRS. II. Is he hump backed.

FRANK. On the contrary his form is faultless.

MRS. II. I give it up! what is it?

FRANK. He is bashful.

MRS. II. (*Laughing.*) What, a man, and bashful?

FRANK. He is the most bashful, timid man in the presence of females I ever saw; it completely unmans him, so that he don't really know whether he is standing upon his head or his heels.

MRS. II. Well, I must say, Frank, that your description of him is very flattering; however, as the doctors say, it is a curable disease.

FRANK. Yes, and you are the doctor to whose care I wish to commit him.

MRS. II. Well, I'll undertake; that is, provided the patient is worth saving.

FRANK. Depend upon it, Fanny, that he is in every respect a most worthy man, but this infirmity is the bane of his existence.

MRS. H. I think he can be cured; and perhaps when I see the patient I may think him worth the trial.

FRANK. (*Rising and preparing to leave.*) I hope it will prove so. But I must leave you until evening, adieu; I shall be punctual; so until seven this evening, farewell. (*Exit.*)

MRS. H. That's a dear good fellow; so candid, generous and open-hearted. Ah, she is a happy woman who is soon to call him husband. (*Goes to table and places things.*) Heigh, ho! I wonder what kind of progress I shall make with Frank's friend? I didn't even ask his name. Well, no matter; he probably has one. I'll go and finish my letter to cousin Mary, and then prepare for my evening visitors. Oh, these men, these men, how you do plague us poor women. (*Exit.*)

SCENE III.

(*The room of Mr. Hobbs, as before.*)

HOBBS. (*Enters.*) Well, here I am, about to be led to the sacrifice. (*Walks about in considerable excitement, occasionally sitting down and hopping up again.*) I wonder what o'clock it is? (*Consults his watch.*) Just fifteen minutes to seven, and seven is the awful hour. I don't wish that any accident would befall Frank, but if some one would detain him, or he could tumble down and break his neck just a little,—no, I don't mean that,—or something would occur to prevent this meeting. (*Consults watch.*) No use, the watch keeps going, and every tick brings me nearer to the awful moment. (*Sits down, but hops up again.*) It's no use, I can't sit,—I'm nervous as an eel undergoing the pleasing process of being skinned. (*Consults watch.*) Yes, watch keeps going a-head; eight minutes more of agony left. Whew! what a perspiration I am in, to be sure. No I ain't. Boo-o-o. I'm all of a shiver. (*Sits in chair.*) I wonder what the matter is with me. I wish I had a composing draught.

FRANK. (*Calling without.*) Hobbs, are you there?

HOBBS. (*Sinks down in his chair.*) I've got it; there's a composing draught.

FRANK. (*Without.*) Hobbs, are you up stairs?

HOBBS. Yes, I'm here; what there is of me.

FRANK. (*Without.*) All right; I'm a little late.—
(*Enters.*) Here I am, Hobbs; sorry I kept you waiting; but I *couldn't help it*

HOBBS. (*Rising, but quite overcome.*) Don't apologize, I beg; if you hadn't come for two hours I would have waited patiently.

FRANK. Bless me, I thought you would be in a perfect fever of anxiety.

HOBBS. So I have been, but the anxiety was on the other side of the question.

FRANK. Bless you, Hobbs, what do you mean?

HOBBS. Look at me, Frank! you behold before you a wretched, miserable being who feels that his time has come.

FRANK. Nonsense, man! you miserable and wretched when you are about to be introduced to one of the loveliest of women? Nonsense, man! you ought to be the happiest of fellows. Come, come; it is time we were moving.

HOBBS. (*Goes very leisurely and gets his hat.*) Fatal visit.

FRANK. Come; the hour is already past, and it is not polite to keep a lady waiting. (*Takes Hobbs by the arm and urges him forward.*)

HOBBS. Ah, Frank, you don't know what you are about. I'm an undone man.

FRANK. Fiddle, faddle, man; come hurry up. (*Both exit somewhat rapidly talking in dumb show.*)

SCENE. IV.

(*Apartment of Mrs. Harcourt; she is discovered seated with a book in hand.*)

MRS. H (*Reads.*) "Of earthly goods, the best is a good wife; a bad, the bitterest curse of human life." That is a pretty sentiment, and very prettily expressed; and what is more, I must confess that it is true. (*Looks off the stage.*) Why, as I live, it is half-past seven, Frank and his friend will soon be here; that is, if his friend's heart has not failed him. Out of the dozen letters which I have received in answer to the "Personal" I have saved but one. (*Draws from her pocket a letter.*) Here it is; all the rest have found the flames. This I kept for its singularity, and because it is so unlike the rest. (*Opens letter and reads.*)

"*Dear Unknown*: I know not whether you are a woman, and the author of the advertisement in the *Bulletin*, or whether you are sincere in your desire therein expressed; but supposing you to be a woman, and believing you sincere, I answer it according to directions. Of myself, I can say little else than that I am a man, comparatively young, and in my prime; I am not poor, and have nothing to offer in my own praise. I would scorn to deceive a confiding woman, hence I am sincere when I say that I could be a loving, devoted and indulgent husband to a kind and affectionate wife. Should I ever wed, it would be my first and last study to make my wife happy, to cheer her in her sorrows, sympathize with her in her misfortunes, and do all that affectionate devotion could do to make her happy. If these views should accord with your own, please address,

PAUL PEVERILLE,

Box 500."

I declare it is quite affecting. (*Wipes her eyes.*) I've read that letter at least half a dozen times; it breathes the spirit of a true man, whoever he is.

FRANK. (*Speaking without.*) Is she in her room? thank you! I'll walk right up.

MRS. H. (*Conceals the letter.* There is Frank. (*Frank enters.*) So, so, Frank; you're here at last, are you?

FRANK. As you say, Fanny, I'm here at last, but I've had *such* a time of it.

MRS. H. Indeed? and how so?

FRANK. About every twenty steps I took in company with my friend whom I proposed to present to you, I was under the necessity of stopping to reason with him before I could get him to move.

MRS. H. You surprise me; where is the poor, dear fellow?

FRANK. I left him below to compose himself, or I should have been obliged to bring him in bodily.

MRS. H. Poor fellow, how I do pity him; do show him in.

FRANK. I'll make the attempt. (*Exit.*)

MRS. H. Really, how much the poor dear man must suffer in his feelings. At all events, I'll do my best to make him feel himself at ease. for I couldn't find it in my heart to tease him. (*She looks off.*) Here they come.

FRANK. (*Enters backwards, having Hobbs by the hand, urging him in, whilst Hobbs comes unwillingly along with his face averted from Mrs. H.*) Come, come, my boy; courage, Hobbs, it will be all over in a minute.

HOBBS. I know it. Frank; it will be all over with me in less time than that.

FRANK. Now then, Hobbs, do your best; here is the lady. -

HOBBS. (*Seems quite overcome.*) Support me, Frank: I feel I'm going.

FRANK. Mrs. Fanny Harcourt, allow me the pleasure of introducing to you my particular and valued friend, Mr. Hobbs.

(Hobbs bows with his back to the lady, and his hat under his arm.)

MRS. H. I trust Mr. Hobbs finds himself well this evening.

HOBBS. (*Abstractedly.*) Yes—Miss, Madam—I believe that is—the report.

MRS. H. I remarked, Mr. Hobbs, that I hoped you found yourself *well* this evening.

HOBBS. (*Drops his hat.*) Yes—certainly, Miss.

MRS. H. Anything new this evening, Mr. Hobbs?

HOBBS. It—does look—like rain Miss, madam.

MRS. H. I inquired if there was any news?

HOBBS. I don't think there is, ma'am, Miss; at least, not with me.

FRANK. My dear Mrs. Harcourt, my friend met with rather an unpleasant affair this afternoon which has somewhat discomposed him; he will soon regain his usual self-possession.

MRS. H. Frank, I perceive your friend has dropped his hat; perhaps he is not aware of it.

HOBBS. Oh yes, Miss, that is madam. (*He makes an awkward attempt to recover it, in which he finally succeeds.*) I know, yes, very.

MRS. H. (*Pointing to a chair—he sits on her left, and Frank on the left of Hobbs.*) Pray, Mr. Hobbs, be seated.

HOBBS. Thank you, Miss, you're too kind.

MRS. H. (*Aside.*) He's improving. Mr. Hobbs, you and my friend Frank were college chums, I believe.

HOBBS. Yes, Miss, exactly.

FRANK. Yes, Mrs. Harcourt, he and I were chums at college, and I must say that there never was a better fellow, or a better scholar; he was always a particular favorite with the ladies.

HOBBS. (*Aside to Frank.*) What are you saying, Frank? you'll ruin me.

MRS. H. I cannot for a moment doubt your statement, Frank, but I should think the ladies would desire less reserve and a little more freedom.

HOBBS. I can't help it, miss—I don't,—

FRANK. True, Mrs. Harcourt; Mr. Hobbs is somewhat reserved. but he will improve.

MRS. H. I doubt not.

FRANK. (*Rises*) You must excuse me now; I have an engagement with a lady, which having fulfilled, I will return.

HOBBS. (*Pulls him down in the chair.*) Frank, if you love me, don't leave me.

FRANK. Nonsense, man, you're doing finely.

MRS. H. Why didn't you say *the* lady, Frank?

FRANK. Ah well, widow. you know it all; my engagement is with *the* lady; so farewell. Hobbs, my friend, I'll see you again. Mrs. H., a pleasant good evening to you, and may the lady doctor be successful with her patient. (*Mrs. H. follows Frank, and takes leave of him as he exits.*)

HOBBS. (*Aside.* Good gracious, what will become of me? alone with a woman.

MRS. H. (*Returning to a seat next to where Hobbs is seated.*) Did you speak, Mr. Hobbs?

HOBBS. Yes,—no,—that is,—no, not at all.

MRS. H. Oh, I thought you spoke. Are you a judge of likenesses, Mr. Hobbs?

HOBBS. No, Miss,—that is,—I believe not.

MRS. H. (*Handing a picture shut up in a case.*) Would you be so kind as to look at this?

HOBBS. (*Looks at the unopened case.*) Certainly, Miss.—Madam,—very fine.

MRS. H. What do you think of it, Mr. Hobbs?

HOBBS. I think,—yes—it is,—quite pretty.

MRS. H. But, Mr. Hobbs, perhaps you had better *open* it.

HOBBS. (*Confused, attempts to laugh.*) Oh, la; yes, Madam,—Miss,—beg pardon.

MRS. H. Does it resemble me?

HOBBS. Certainly, yes, Miss,—Madam.

MRS. H. Perhaps, Mr. Hobbs, you could judge with more accuracy, if you would condescend to look at *me* as well as the picture.

HOBBS. (*Aside*) Good gracious, now for it. Yes, Miss. (*Gives her a side'long glance.*) Oh, isn't she beautiful!

MRS. H. You think it a good likeness then?

HOBBS. Yes, Madam,—excellent.

MRS. H. (*Aside.*) Oh, he is getting on bravely. (*She glances at his neck handkerchief.*) Mr. Hobbs, who tied that bow in your neck 'kerchief.

HOBBS. I did, Miss,—Madam.

MRS. H. I don't like it; will you allow me to tie it over again?

HOBBS. Oh, certainly, Madam; if you wish.

MRS. H. (*Re-tying the beau knot.*) I like to see a gentleman's neck tie put on with some taste. *There*, that looks better.

HOBBS. So it does, Miss. (*Aside.*) What a charming woman.

MRS. H. Shall I trouble you to look at some family pictures, Mr. Hobbs? (*Rises.*)

HOBBS. (*Retaining his seat.*) Oh, no trouble at all.

MRS. H. (*Going up the stage and pointing off.*) That is a picture of my father, somewhat celebrated as an attorney.

HOBBS. Very pretty, Madam,—yes.

MRS. H. (*Comes down to where Hobbs sits and touches him upon the shoulder.*) Suppose you were to rise and step this way; I think you could see them much better.

HOBBS. Oh, yes, Miss,—excuse me. (*Rises.*)

MRS. H. Will you allow me? (*She offers to take his arm, which he puts out awkwardly.*)

HOBBS. Certainly,—yes,—Madam.

MRS. H. (*She leads him up the stage and points off*) That picture, as I just remarked, is a likeness of my father, an attorney.

HOBBS. Yes, Miss,—an attorney.

MRS. H. (*Pointing off.*) That, is a likeness of my grandfather; he held a colonel's commission in the American army.

HOBBS. Yes, Miss,—a military man.

MRS. H. This picture, (*pointing off.*) is the likeness of—who do you think?

HOBBS. (*Looks up timidly*) That's you, Miss.

MRS. H. Right, Mr. Hobbs; I didn't think you could guess, for you have not looked at me since you came into the room.

HOBBS. I beg pardon, Miss,—I have—

MRS. H. Only *once*, Mr. Hobbs; only once, I'm sure and then I was forced to *ask* you to do so.

HOBBS. Yes, Madam,—I did once,—I know I did. (*Aside.*) I shall never forget it; would she were mine.

(*They come down and resume their seats.*)

MRS. H. Mr. Hobbs, I fear I have been guilty of a great indiscretion, but my love for a little fun led me to it.

HOBBS. (*Aside.*) Gracious, what is coming now?—Yes, Miss; nothing serious, I hope.

MRS. H. Hear, and then judge. (*Hands him the newspaper.*) Read that "*Personal*."

HOBBS. (*Takes paper, reads to himself, and then returns it.*) Yes, Miss,—I've read it.

MRS. H. Now, you must know, Mr. Hobbs, that I put that into the paper in sport, and I have received several answers.

HOBBS. Have you,—indeed.

MRS. H. Yes, and I burnt them all but one; that one I kept, and have been very unhappy since I received it. I have read it over and over again, and you may be sure that whoever wrote it; he possesses the heart of a *true man*. Will you favor me with your views of it. (*Hands Hobbs the letter*)

HOBBS. (*Looks at letter. Aside.*) Good gracious, my letter, as I live.

MRS. H. (*Observing his uneasiness.*) Bless me, Mr. Hobbs, what's the matter? do you know the writing?

HOBBS. No—I think,—I guess not.

MRS. H. Do you think the writer of that an honest man?

HOBBS. (*Very promptly.*) I know he is, Miss,—(*recollecting himself.*) that is I think so. (*Aside.*) I'm getting bold, and I shall throw myself into that woman's arms, I know I shall.

MRS. H. I'd give something to know him.

HOBBS. (*Aside.*) The moment has come.

MRS. H. I would really like to know him.

HOBBS. (*Kneels.*) Behold him at your feet.

MRS. H. Why, Mr. Hobbs.

HOBBS. Mrs. Harcourt, my dear Unknown.

MRS. H. Then that letter,—

HOBBS. Is mine. (*Aside*) I've plunged in and I am lost.

MRS. H. (*Laughing*) My dear Mr. Hobbs, don't kneel there, pray.

HOBBS. (*Putting up both hands and gazing into her face,*) I am praying.

MRS. H. Do rise, Mr. Hobbs; dear Mr. Hobbs.

HOBBS. Dear Mrs. Harcourt, assist me.

MRS. H. (*Assists him up. Sits.*) What a singular adventure.

HOBBS. I feel bold now; that is in your presence.—My dear Mrs. Harcourt I feel that you have made a man of me; how can I ever repay you for this kindness? (*Takes her hand and kneels.*) Here, on my knees, let me swear eternal—

FRANK. (*Enters hurriedly.*) Ah, oh, Hobbs, Hobbs what are you doing?

HOBBS. (*Looking up perfectly cool, and keeping his position.*) Oh, you're too late. Frank! I'm a changed man and this angel of a woman has cured me. I couldn't help it.

MRS. H. Women are not angels, Mr. Hobbs.

HOBBS. Well, you are my guardian angel.

FRANK. I rather think, Hobbs, that a little love on both sides has helped the matter along; ha, Fanny?

MRS. H. (*Playfully.*) Oh, you saucy man; how can you impute such motive.

FRANK. (*Taking Mrs. H. by the hand.*) I don't, I don't ! none will rejoice at this change more than I shall. (*To Hobbs.*) Hobbs, you are trapped at last. (*Pointing to the audience.*) Perhaps your friends here will rejoice with you too ; suppose you try.

HOBBS. (*Advancing front.*) Ladies and Gentlemen : I hope this little trifle has pleased you. Is there a bashful man here ? (*Looks over the audience and then points at an imaginary individual.*) Yes, I see one ; there he sits. Poor fellow, I pity you. I know all about it. (*Mrs. H. and Frank now come down, standing so as to bring Mrs. H. in the centre.*) I have been through the awful ordeal. But let me tell you a secret ; a woman surpasses all physicians in skill to cure that worst of all sick patients,—

MRS. H. A BASHFUL MAN.

Quick Curtain.

DISPOSITION OF CHARACTERS.

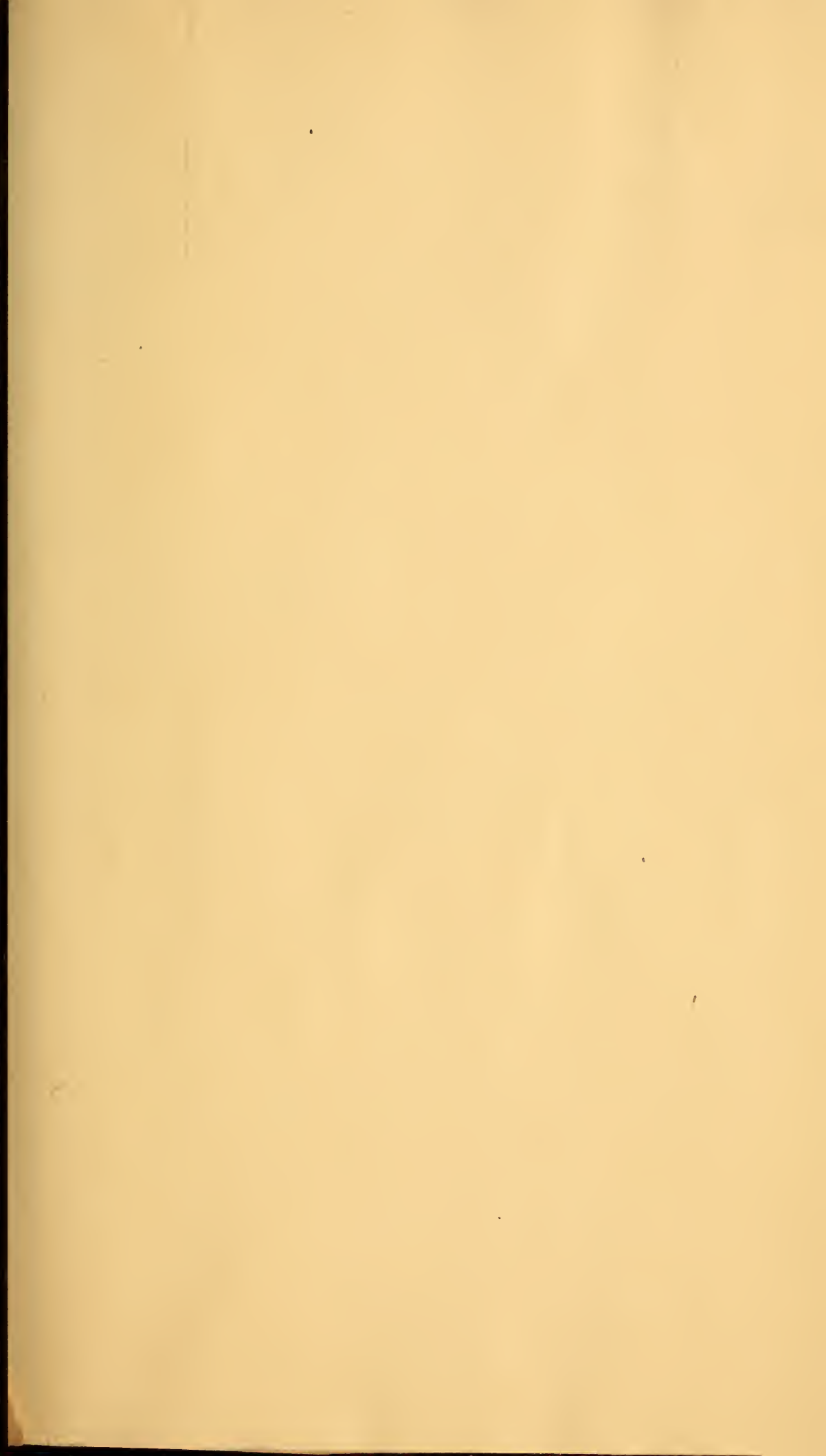
Hobbs.

Mrs. H.

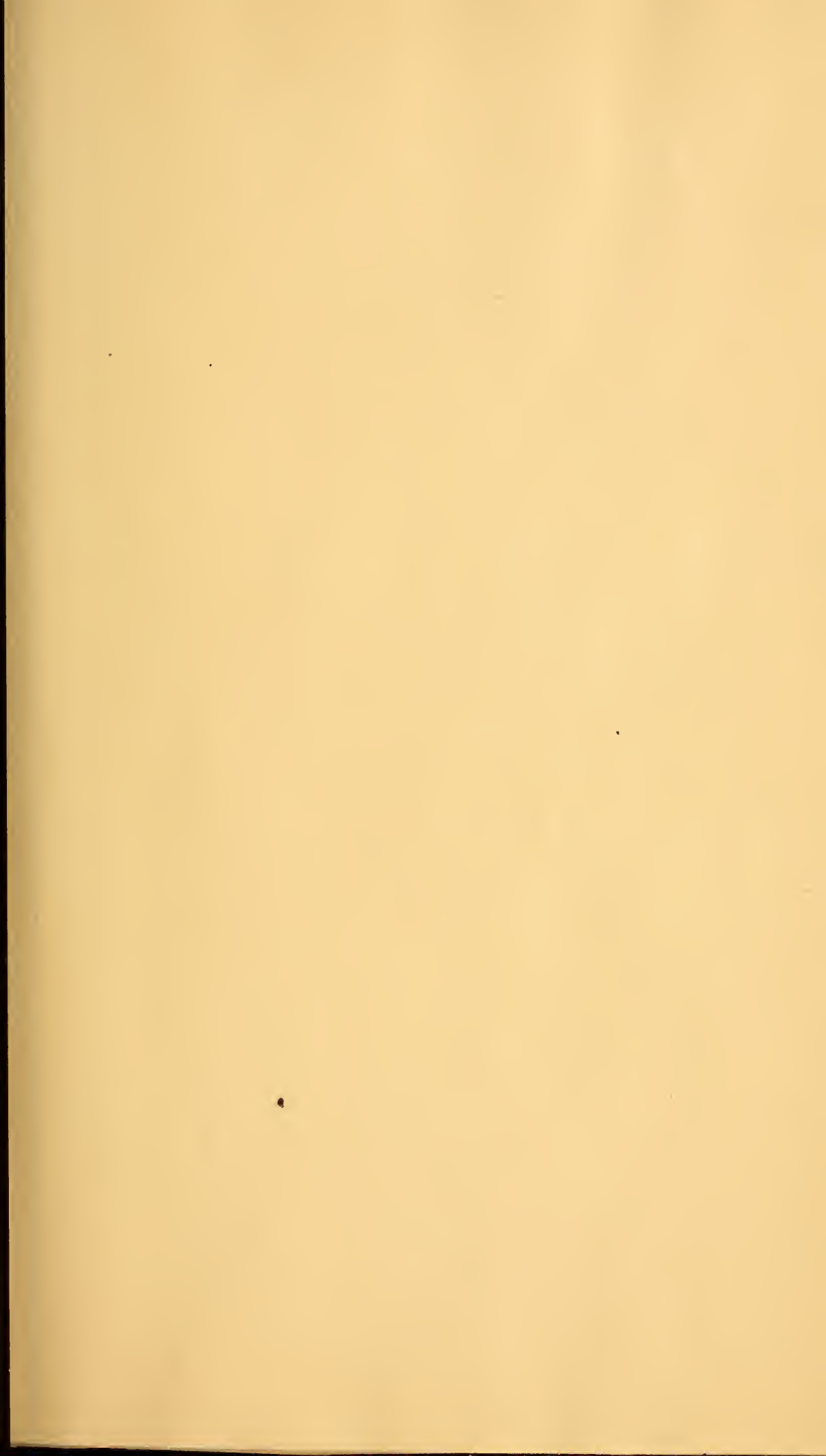
Frank.

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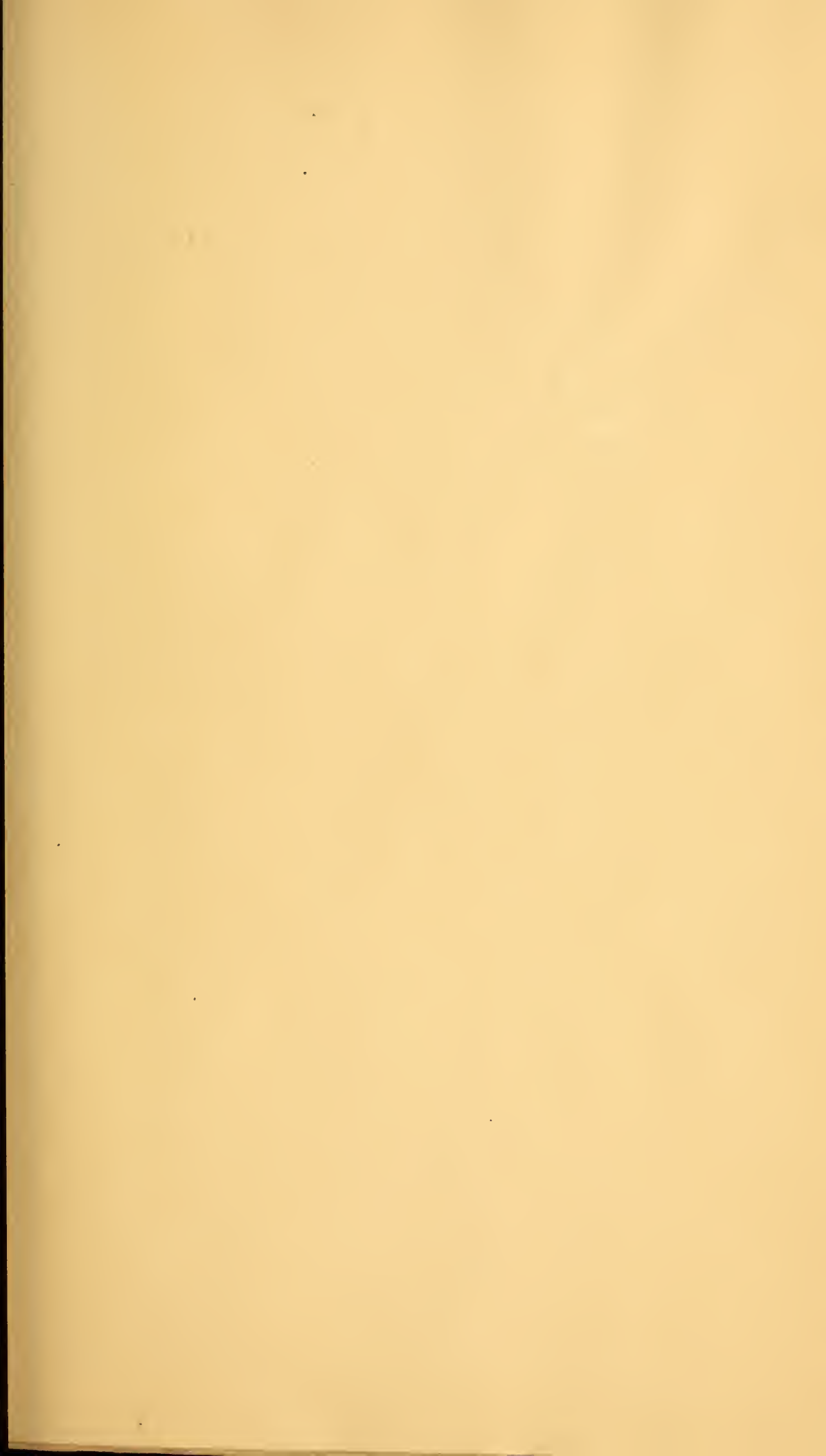




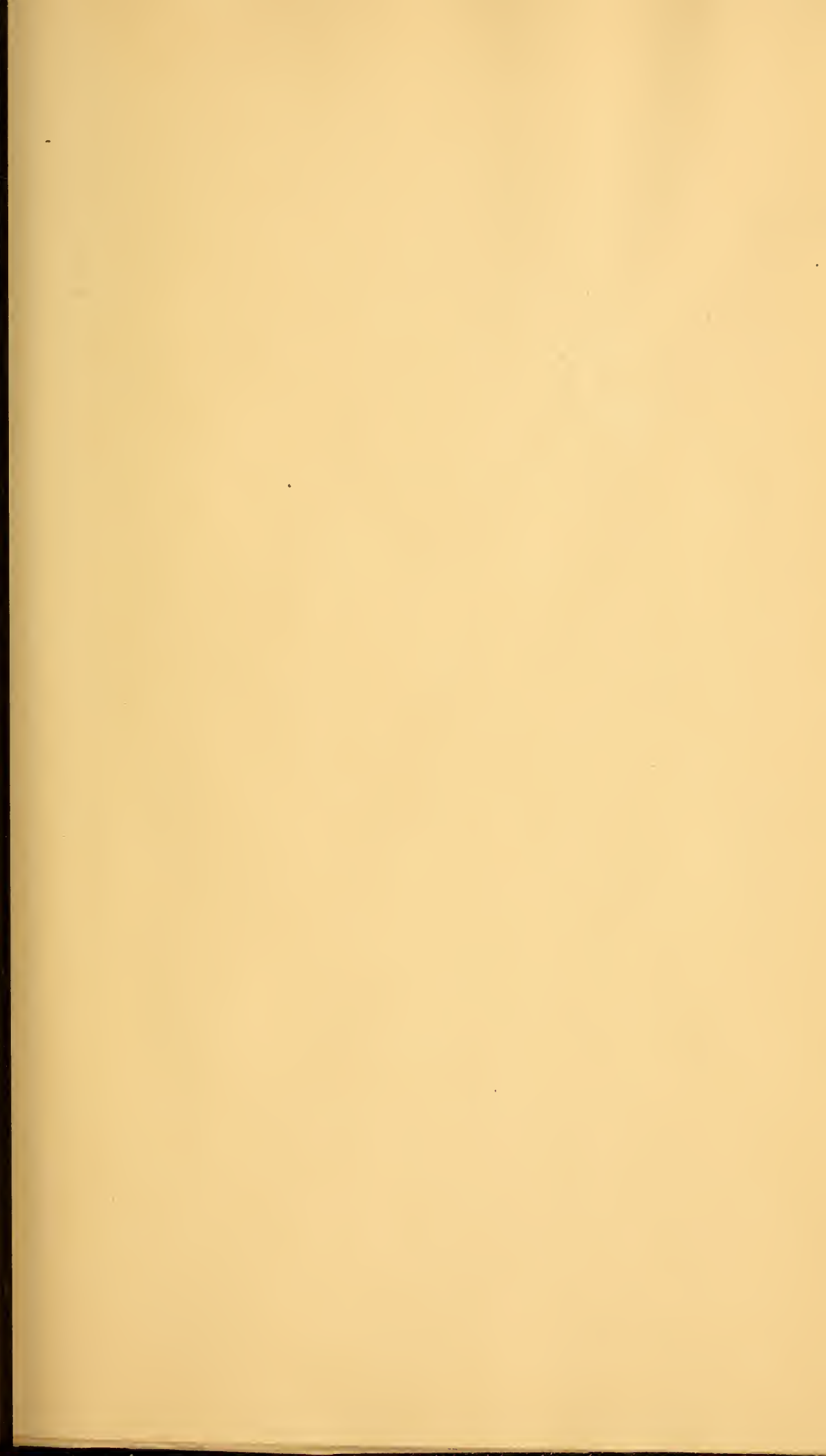




































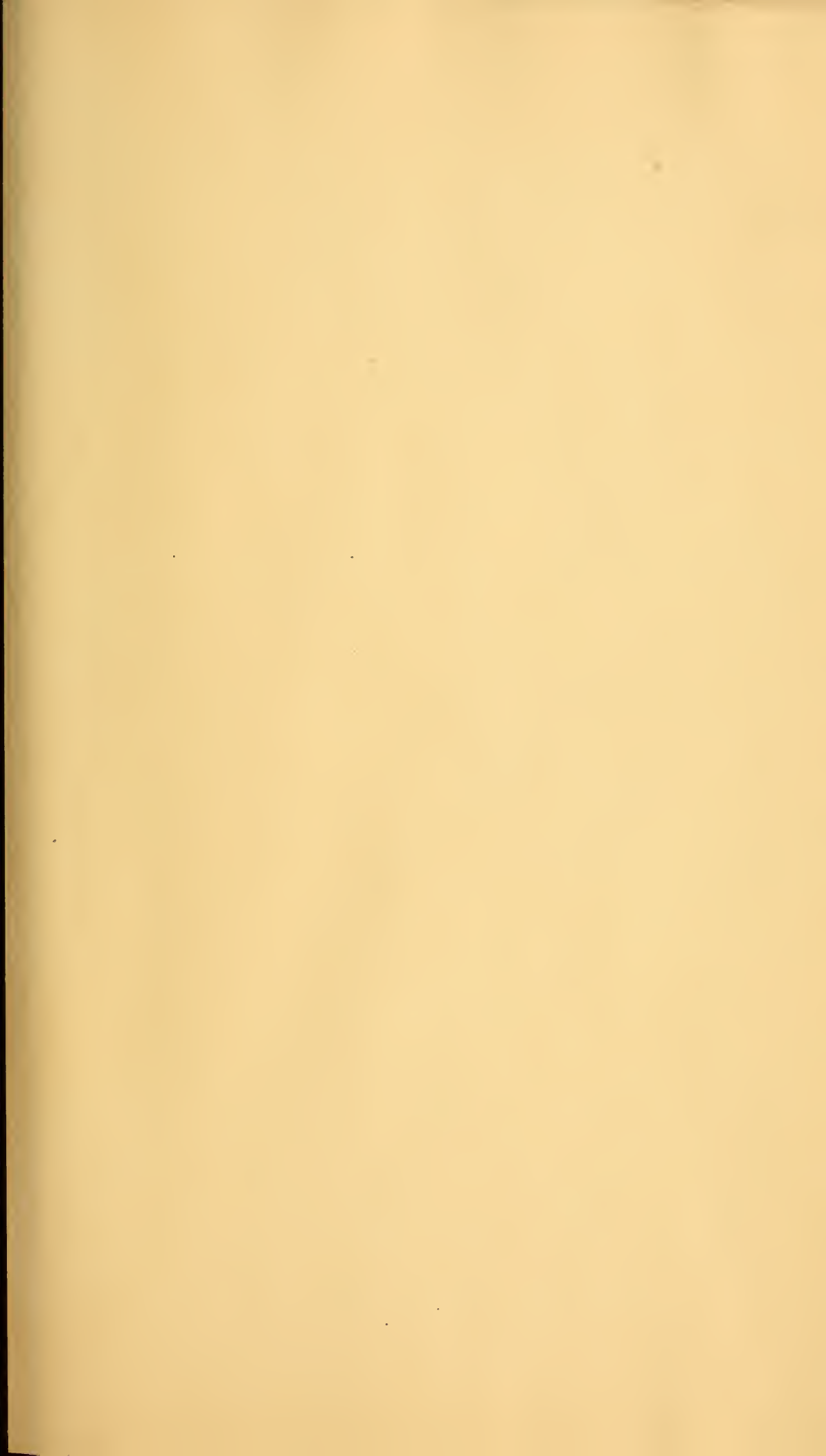














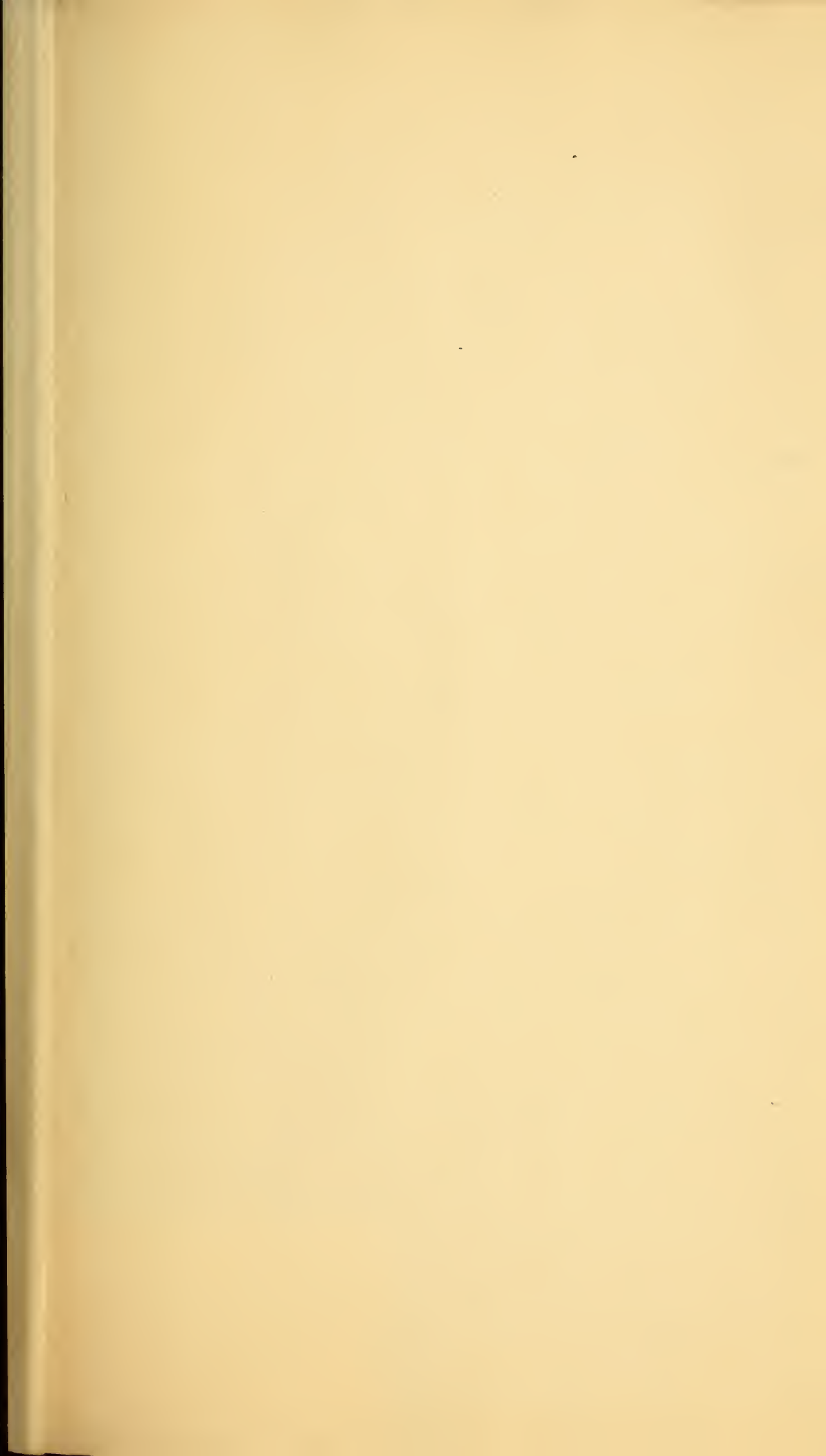












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